

THE NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

ORGANIZED FEBRUARY 23, 1901

LEAFLET
NO. 89

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NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL.

APRIL 1
1911

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REPORT OF MARCH MEETING

Over three hundred members and friends of the New England Association of Teachers of English met in Jacob Sleeper Hall of Boston University on Saturday morning, March 18th, to listen to the program which President James A. Tufts and the Executive Committee had prepared.

At the opening of the business session, the officers whose names are printed above were elected. After the reports of the Secretary-Treasurer and the Editor had been read and accepted, the Association proceeded at once to the discussion of the general topic, *Differentiation of the English Course in Secondary Schools*.

The first paper of the morning was from Mr. D. O. S. Lowell, Roxbury Latin School. His main argument is here reproduced in his own words,—divorced, alas, for lack of space, from the clever pleasantries and charm of his introduction.

For the purposes of discussion this morning, I think we may all agree that until the high school is reached, all pupils may have the same training in English. After that time, however, I am told that there are some who would differentiate the English fare between the scholars and the toilers.

Let us suppose that we have two groups, one of each class just mentioned, at the beginning of the high school course. Let us further suppose that all chaff has been carefully winnowed out after the grammar school threshing. I believe there are at least three good reasons why the same kind of English should be taught to both scholars and toilers.

1. A differentiation would be *unnatural*; it would smack of *uncommon* sense. Some things are predetermined by the

nature of the case. Most of us have an innate conviction, which perhaps we cannot explain, but which is no less real, that two and two are four. The case in question seems to me to be one of natural logic. Would you say that vulgar fractions are good enough for the toilers, but that the upper ten should be allowed to revel in decimals? Would you teach the scholar the geography of civilized countries only, but let the toiler content himself with deserts and jungles? Would you keep one section under blue glass, let them breathe only filtered air, and drink only distilled water from a copy-righted still? or would you give Nature's elements to all alike, whatever their heredity, tendency, or outlook? Manifestly the differentiation of light, water, and air for natural, normal children would be *unnatural*; but not a whit more so than to allow one of the two sections to drink deep from wells of English undefiled, but to persuade the other to slake its thirst at a tank. The best English is not too good for one who is to use the language practically rather than academically, whether as a means of daily intercourse, or as a means of occasional recreation and enjoyment in moments of stinted leisure.

2. My second objection is, that it would be *undemocratic* to differentiate and discriminate. Shall I tell the putative scholar that he has the capacity to understand Shakespeare, but compel the prospective toiler to still his dramatic yearnings by a careful perusal of George Ade? Shall I admit that the former has a right to enjoy the novels of Hawthorne, but contend that the latter would better employ his time on Rider Haggard? Shall I encourage the child of fortune to appreciate John Milton, but dole out to the child of the people the poems of Isaac Watts? I care not how you discriminate provided you *do* discriminate. What is good sauce for the goose is equally good for the gander. If caviare is a necessity on your bill of fare, distribute it to the general as well as to the particular. To relish it may demand an acquired taste, but it's better than garlic, anyway. It would be decidedly *undemocratic* to give one selection of books in English literature to pupils preparing for college and quite another selection to the prospective producers of our land. It would tend to establish an aristocracy of literature. It would give a false impression to the pupils themselves: it would tend to humiliate the one and to make vainglorious the other. And apart from all this, we should give ourselves needless trouble. We fuddle our brains even now, trying to decide which are the 100 Best Books or the 100 Worst Books for adolescents. Why should we add to our perplexities by attempting to differentiate the differentiated?

3. My third objection to a differentiation of the English course in Secondary Schools is, that from my point of view it would be *unjust*. "Unjust to which section?" you may ask. Frankly, I do not know. It would be unjust to either if the other had something better. But you may say, "The college English would be bad for the toilers." Very possibly; but in that case it is also bad for the collegians, and ought to be reformed. Most of us teach in fitting schools. Heaven help us if we ever degenerate into cramming schools. No preparation for college should ever be a cram. That is not the way to prepare for life, and life is larger than college. We should teach, or aim to teach, many things that no examiner will ever ask, meanwhile including all that he ought to ask.

In brief, then, my objections to Differentiation, as I understand the proposition, are that it would be *unnatural, undemocratic, and unjust*. Why I have those objections, I have endeavored briefly to show. In conclusion let me ask, why do we teach higher English anyway? Is the object a commercial one? I trust not. Is it merely an intellectual aim that we have in view? Again, I trust not. If our teaching and our courses do not aim higher than all that, — to the culture and refinement and purification of the soul and spirit, then what we need is *not* Differentiation, but Conversion.

Mr. Lowell was followed by Miss Josephine Hammond, of The Practical Arts High School, Boston, with a talk on *The Necessity of Differentiation*. Miss Hammond commented upon the fact that the rapidly increasing changes in the character of our high school population demanded differentiation. Children from homes of scant culture and children of the foreign born could not assimilate the literature which we have been giving the college preparatory group. Because of their limited background, a change in the English curriculum had become necessary in order that the proper connection between literature and life could be established. Of this necessity teachers in the academies and colleges were still unconvinced, but conviction would follow actual experience.

Miss Hammond was followed by Miss Kate Stanley of the Technical High School in Springfield. She said in part:

Gradually as the aim of the English work in a Technical High School shaped itself, it was realized that a Technical High School offered rare opportunities for English in three lines. First in the way of forming a course of study. Beginning with the first simple purpose, the determination to emphasize the power of self-expression, it was found that the boys had much to say. They know how to do things, and

they found joy in telling what they knew. Rarely does the question arise, "What shall I write about?" Moreover, there is much general information on all sorts of subjects to draw from constantly. Thus in a Technical High School work in exposition and description is assured, and in imaginative narrative writing good work is done. If not brilliancy, there is certainly, for the most part, an earnestness and faithfulness in the composition work that comes only when there is a purpose in life and when there is a belief in the value of the thing undertaken.

In literature the problem is harder. There is constantly rivalry between the interests of the shops and what one may properly call the literary interests. In a freshman class, apparently absorbed in the story of the *Iliad*, one youngster leaned forward and whispered to the boy in front. The teacher, full of her enthusiasm for the glowing pages of Homer, asked the boy what he had said, expecting from the light in his face a valuable contribution to the very valuable lesson. She was not a little surprised when the expression of interest changed into a flush of embarrassment as the boy answered, "A Winton!" "A Winton!" ejaculated the mystified teacher, so lost in the memories of the ancient Greeks she had no idea what the boy means. "Why, yes!" said the boy in his turn mystified at the teacher's supreme stupidity. "Don't you hear it?" "No," said the teacher humbled, brought back suddenly to the vibrating building, the sound of automobiles and the group of embryo electricians, engineers, and machinists before her. "Go, see if he is right, every one of you." A grand stampede to the windows confirmed the boy's hearing, — a Winton was speeding just in sight far up the road.

"What's the use of reading this?" is a question which every teacher in a Technical High School must fortify herself for before presenting any piece of literature. It is sure to come in one form or another unless she anticipates it by showing the value of the selection by the way she teaches it. The great appeal to boys in literature is rather on the side of ideals than of art. They love to think, and the man who surprises them into a new thought has their admiration. They are full of sentiment, and the book that stirs their emotions or rouses in them noble feeling has their respect. Often it greatly annoys them to dwell on the mechanism of expression which an author uses to portray his thoughts. A boy said, "I used just to love poetry because it seemed so wonderful and high above one. Now that I know alliteration, it is just an ordinary thing that man can make." He was a companion spirit to the boy who, having listened to the reading of Shelley's *Skylark*, exclaimed, "Gee, that's great;

though, really, I don't know what it means; but I don't want to spoil it by grinding over it to find it. Will you read it again?" After all, it does not make so very much difference what we teach as how we do it. The question as to what books shall be read does not compare in importance with the question as to the personality of the teacher.

Great men, men whose lives are consecrated to their work, men of culture and deep learning, men worthy to be the friends of the greatest minds who have thought and spoken, men who have practical ideals as to what a man should be in order to live correctly and happily in a community, — these men should read great books with and to our boys. There would be then no question as to the value of the course of study.

The discussion of the morning's theme was most ably continued by Dr. Charles W. Eliot, President-Emeritus of Harvard University, and Mr. Charles A. Prosser, Massachusetts Deputy Commissioner of Education. We have a complete stenographic report of Dr. Eliot's address, which we shall issue later in the year. Mr. Prosser's facility in speech baffled our stenographers, and the privilege of printing his remarks is therefore denied us. Suffice it to say that he committed himself forcibly and unreservedly to the policy of differentiation.

Miss Mabel A. Watson, of the Haverhill High School, has very kindly sent us what she might have said at the March Meeting had the discussion been general.

The feeling is mine that I am placing myself in the class of the unwise who rush impetuously where the saintly tread with caution; but, like Burke, I take comfort in the thought that "being destitute of all shadow of influence," I can offer nothing which could in any way "awe, dazzle, or delude you."

In regard to this question of differentiation my position is as follows: I teach in a school of nearly eight hundred pupils. Some of them are planning to go to college; more are not. We have one course in English for all, with the exception that more time is allowed for drill in composition in certain sections which obviously must require such. The subjects given in literature are the same. I am imagining what could result should we make a change in a school where the students meet each other so intimately as they do in Haverhill High. I gathered that it was taken for granted in the discussion on March 18th that the college preparatory pupils, being of the elect, would thrill with rapture as they read those subjects which were, let us cautiously say, too remote for the non-college pupils. Such being the case, they would, if like most of the students I have known, allude to their blissful experiences in the presence of those not so favored. To us would come the questioning ones: "Why can't we read the Spectator Papers? The fellows say they are great." Two answers only seem possible to me, — both of which I admit might be stated with more diplomacy and pro-

portionately less clearness than I give them: "You are too stupid"; the other, "You have not soul enough to appreciate them." Experience has not as yet provided me with either the pupil or the class to whom I could placidly make such a response.

Personally, I have never wished to differentiate in the manner discussed. Of course I have thought of it; none but the deaf could have escaped giving it at least a fleeting attention. In regard to the de Coverley papers (I judged they were considered the chief offender) this has been my recent experience. I gave them out to a class of boys. After talking a bit about the time when they were written and the naive description of a club which had existence only in the fertile brains of Steele and Addison, we read aloud one of the sketches. If any one was bored, he was more successful in concealing it than some teachers have been to whom my attention has been attracted at professional gatherings. I assigned no other lesson than, "Read on as far as you can."

The next time the section came to me I announced apologetically, but with intent, that I should have to attend to some work for a few minutes,—would they please read on. Meanwhile, I watched with eye and ear alert. Soon I heard a joyous chuckle and saw one of the boys leaning across the aisle to point out to his neighbor the passage which had filled him with glee. Then, meeting my inquiring gaze, he said, "Narrow escape that, being on a battlefield the day before the fight came off!" And we laughed together.

I let them pretty much alone throughout the entire course. Most of their recitations were volunteered, and all had much to say. In their themes, which were attempts to imitate in form the original periodical, they hunted for the Spectator and his friends in different coffee houses where they learned more of the London of that day. They also happily conducted Sir Roger to their own school affairs, where he made comments on the foibles of our own time which were both pertinent and useful. These boys are not members of a college section. Several other teachers have reported to me the same experience.

The conviction is strengthened within me every year that the trouble is not with the subject chosen, but with our method of presentation. That is where we must differentiate. Suppose that a pupil of "The Fireside Companion Stage" were asked to bring that periodical to class for study. If he were requested to outline carefully its contents, to explain every difficult word, to analyze its plots, if such appear in its columns (I must confess I don't know what I am talking about) and to commit to memory many of its least alluring passages, I wonder how long it would hold his interest.

Many of my seniors have been buying their own books for work in literature. While we were studying Macaulay's "Johnson," an order sent to a publishing house was delayed so that some of the books did not reach us until the course was nearly finished. I told the students that they need not take them unless they chose. No one declined. Instead, two more asked for books, saying that they would like to have them to keep anyway. Several of these students were boys to whom the price of the book was not an inconsiderable sum, and who had no thought of going to college.

One of my most appreciative boys has been but three years out of Russia, and has learned our language since he came. One of my seemingly most frivolous girls confessed, when caught on a street car with a small copy of Browning's poems in her pocket, that she "loved to read it." I said "confessed," for she blushed like a boy caught doing an especially kind act. One of the students who was graduated in last year's class asked for an evening's conference on the books which he should buy, saying, "Since I can't go to college, I want to be sure

to go on reading the right sort." A girl came to me just the other day to inquire, "What's the matter with me that I can't enjoy *The Vicar of Wakefield*?" a book which she had voluntarily chosen to read. My heart leaped up at the form of the question. Notice that she did not say, "What's the matter with *The Vicar of Wakefield*?" I told her that her discomfort was simply a "growing pain," and we had a talk which I have reason to believe did us both good.

But why multiply illustrations? From such particulars, taken in every instance from non-college pupils, I can draw no other conclusion than that the differentiation which attempts to exclude such books from those classes is "neither natural, democratic, nor just."

I have for a long time felt that many of us have had too scoffing an attitude toward some of these great pieces of literature. Who are we, to judge! Also, we frequently expect results too soon, and, by our impatient questioning at a somewhat barren outlook, emulate the small boy who, the day after he has planted seed, delves in his garden to see "how my beans is growing." It may be that ours is a line of work where, after we have done our hopeful best, we should reverently wait while God giveth the increase.

If no one were ever asked to teach literature save those who have loved it long enough to themselves appreciate it, and if such could only be granted time enough in which to really do their work, there would be less need of worry about the books to be chosen. In any case, the subject which we ourselves do not enjoy we should never offer to our classes. We should humbly choose another. I personally feel very grateful to the colleges for having shown us so wide a road on which we may so safely travel, and my imagination gets little pleasure from dwelling on the possibilities of that "Serbonian bog" into which we and our classes might have sunk without their wise and friendly aid.

The meeting closed with an address by Rev. Samuel McChord Crothers on *The Charm of Seventeenth Century English Prose*. Only those who are acquainted with Mr. Crothers's inimitable elegance and drollery, can know the appreciation which the Association felt in listening to his telling contrasts between the English of the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries — particularly as this style reveals itself in the translations of the Bible.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

The regular annual assessment of the Association was due on the third Saturday of March. There are still nearly two hundred members who have not sent their dollar to the Treasurer. Will all those who received, with the program of the March meeting, a small printed envelope, please return this with their dues as soon as possible? Members who have joined the Association since November, 1910, according to the Constitution, do not pay another fee until December, 1911.

SAMUEL THURBER, Jr., Treas.,

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